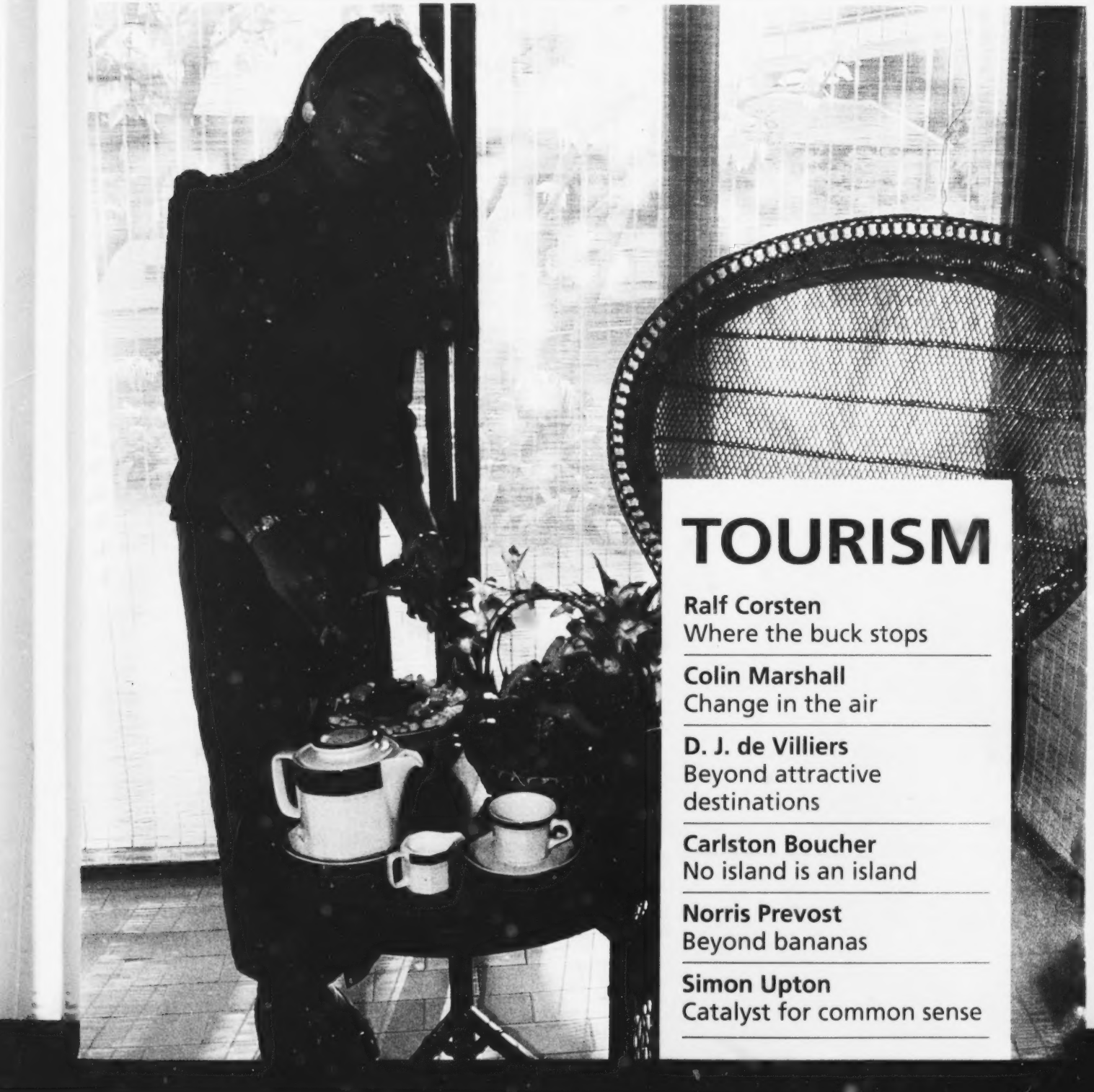
UNEP

our planet

Volume 10 Number 1 1999

The UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME Magazine For Environmentally Sustainable Development



TOURISM

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Where the buck stops

Colin Marshall
Change in the air

D. J. de Villiers
Beyond attractive destinations

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No island is an island

Norris Prevost
Beyond bananas

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Catalyst for common sense

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Our Planet, the bi-monthly magazine of the **United Nations Environment Programme** (UNEP).
PO Box 30552, Nairobi, Kenya.
Tel. (2542) 621 234; fax 623 927; telex 22068 UNEP KE.

ISSN 1013-7394

UNEP Publisher/Director, UNEP Information and Public Affairs Branch: Tore J. Brevik
External Editor: Geoffrey Lean

A Banson production
Printed by Words and Publications, United Kingdom
Front cover: Mark Edwards/Still Pictures

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EDITORIAL

KLAUS TÖPFER
United Nations Under-Secretary General and Executive Director, UNEP

The tourism industry, which includes such diverse activities as transport, accommodation, recreation and catering, serves more than 613 million people each year, some travelling internationally and many more domestically. With more than 260 million employees, and an annual investment in capital projects of over $800 billion, it ranks as a main sector of the world economy, accounting for nearly 11 per cent of global GDP. And it is growing at an average rate of 4 per cent a year. Given its scale, it is not surprising that tourism's effects on the environment, underestimated in the past, are now receiving attention. Its potential impacts are numerous and varied, and are linked to natural resource consumption, pollution and building.

Tourism-generated threats are now felt in many developing countries which lack the technological or financial capacity to handle tourists' resource consumption and waste generation – often far greater than those of the home population. For example, it has been estimated that each trekking tourist in Nepal burns about 6 kilograms of wood per day in a country already desperately short of fuel; a big hotel in Cairo uses the same amount of electricity in a year as 3,600 middle-income Egyptian households; while in the Caribbean, tourist demand for seafood is considered the prime cause of increasing pressure on the lobster and conch populations. The use of 'natural' construction materials also often puts scarce resources at risk. Around the world a number of sites, including protected areas, have already been spoiled by the development of nature-based tourism, with damaging consequences for biodiversity.

Tourist activities also generate pollution: discharge of untreated sewage into the sea or rivers, carbon dioxide and nitrous oxide emissions from transport, and solid wastes – for example it is estimated that the cruise ships in the Caribbean alone produce more than 70,000 tonnes of waste per year. Physical development of tourist facilities and infrastructures also impacts the environment. For example, three-quarters of the sand dunes on the Mediterranean coastline between Spain and Sicily have disappeared, mainly as a result of urbanization linked to tourist development.

The people who profit from tourism are not always those who have to bear its costs. Tourists can disturb the ways of life and social structures of local communities while increasing the cost for local governments of building and maintaining the facilities, such as sewage treatment plants and roads, necessary to cater for large numbers of visitors.

Putting tourism on a sustainable path is a major challenge, requiring partnership and cooperation within the tourism industry, and between the industry, governments and tourists themselves.

Individual companies can take the lead in showing how self-regulation can work by taking voluntary action to reduce pollution, initiating and abiding by codes of practice, and by educating. Likewise, industry associations must continue to develop, promote and adopt codes of conduct and good practice, environmental management and reporting systems, and provide their members with the information necessary to implement them.

The role of governments is equally important. Only they can provide the strategic planning base for tourism which is so clearly needed. Only governments can ensure that valuable and fragile habitats are identified, that baseline studies and monitoring are carried out, and that overall infrastructure needs and implications are assessed. And only they can establish emissions standards and siting and design requirements, and ensure that they are enforced. Wherever possible environmental impact assessments should be carried out, with studies on carrying capacity and limits of acceptable change used to define the number of tourists a site can accommodate.

And tourists themselves must become more aware of the environmental implications of their holidays. Many non-governmental organizations have already made significant steps in modifying consumers' preferences and behaviour through awareness and education programmes, but more remains to be done.

To catalyze appropriate action UNEP, jointly with other international organizations, and in particular the World Tourism Organization and UNESCO, is promoting the definition and development of sustainable tourism through the publication of guidelines and handbooks, the exchange of successful experiences and the support of demonstration projects. UNEP has also put forward principles for the implementation of sustainable tourism, designed to provide a coherent framework for the various conventions governing the industry and to assist all stakeholders to apply sustainable practices.

No-one can question the need for tourism – its benefits to individuals as well as to national and regional economies are clear. Nor would anyone in government or the industry question the need to protect the environmental systems which support it. The challenge, however, is to develop tourism while protecting the environment•

Where the buck STOPS

RALF CORSTEN says the tourist industry and nature are natural allies and describes how companies like his must take responsibility for protecting the environment

An astronaut's-eye view of our planet – and the map of sins against the environment that can be drawn from that viewpoint – show clearly that all parts of the globe are exposed to the ecological damage caused by humanity. But nearly all the major holiday destinations belong to the areas of the world which generate less pollution and are generally less affected by industrial damage to the environment.

These countries benefit, through their income from tourism, from the high level of industrialization and the economic strength of the leading developed countries, the source of nearly all the tourists. This unequivocal fact means that the countries less burdened by industry, and the damage it inflicts, are the indirect beneficiaries of the industrial countries' economic output – often achieved at the expense of the environment. Thus the growing globalization of the world economies requires a global responsibility for safeguarding and protecting the environment.

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) and economic experts estimate that tourism will be one of the world's major growth areas in coming years. They expect that higher-quality tourism will grow even faster than the industry as a whole – and that it will provide large numbers of new jobs as it requires more personal services. By and large tourism is far less of a burden on the environment than other areas of the economy. But its sustainable development, benefiting nature and the environment, is still a top priority for the industry's policy makers. There are two reasons for this:

- Tourist companies like Touristik Union International (TUI) aim to reduce the damage arising from tourism to the minimum. This is particularly urgent, bearing in mind how much the industry is expected to grow in the coming years – and the strain that this will exert on the environment if we fail to make improvements. In the long run, growth will only be possible if natural resources are used sustainably. So, in future, transport, accommodation, catering, waste disposal and other activities that provide for the guests must be organized in a much more cost-efficient and ecological way than in the past.

- The decisive factor determining whether tourists are satisfied with their holidays is the extent to which the quality of facilities and services live up to their expectations. So an intact environment is the prerequisite for enjoyable holidays. This makes it the economic life principle of tourism. No other branch of the global economy is so keenly dependent on clean water and beaches, pure air and intact nature.

An intact environment, for most vacationers, means enjoying a holiday untainted by the harmful influences of industry and mass transport. Only a small circle of experts and highly-aware tourists relate it to such terms as biodiversity, rainforests or ecosystems. Most use the ecological standards and measures of their own home country as their yardstick, though this may be tempered by insights gained from the additional information they learn at their destination. Above all, their satisfaction – or otherwise – with the ecological circumstances of their holiday is determined by what they register with their own senses.

Taking the lead

Travellers' 'green thinking and acting' has grown in recent years, and is valued. But progress in the care and protection of the environment depends on initiatives by policy makers, specialists and key people in the tourist companies themselves, both individually and in partnership with both the private and public sectors of the economy.

Environment protection and nature conservation are therefore natural allies of the tourism industry. Leading ecologists take this view, as well as those in charge in the tourism business. They expect tourism to exert its ever-growing strength in the interests of protecting nature and the environment worldwide.

There are good examples of the positive effects of tourism. For instance, fishermen can make a much better living by taking tourists on boat trips to watch whales than they ever could by hunting them. The growth of tourism over the past 50 years has multiplied the number of the world's nature reserves tenfold: there are now almost 10,000 national parks and reserves worldwide.

'The protection of an intact nature and environment is of the highest importance for us,' reads Rule 8 of TUI's corporate principles. 'We thus secure our natural resources and the future of our business.' The ecological sustainability of our products is an essential element of our quality standards. This principle dominates the awareness of staff and management and serves as a code of conduct for everyone in the company.

Mark Carwardine Still Pictures

TUI established its own Environment Department in November 1990, the first company in the world to do so. This unit is one of the TUI's central functions and part of its corporate management. It is thus responsible for all the group's subsidiaries in all its source and destination markets, and for all stages in the chain of the business, including travel agencies, tour operators, carriers, incoming agencies and hotels.

Its work is aimed at:

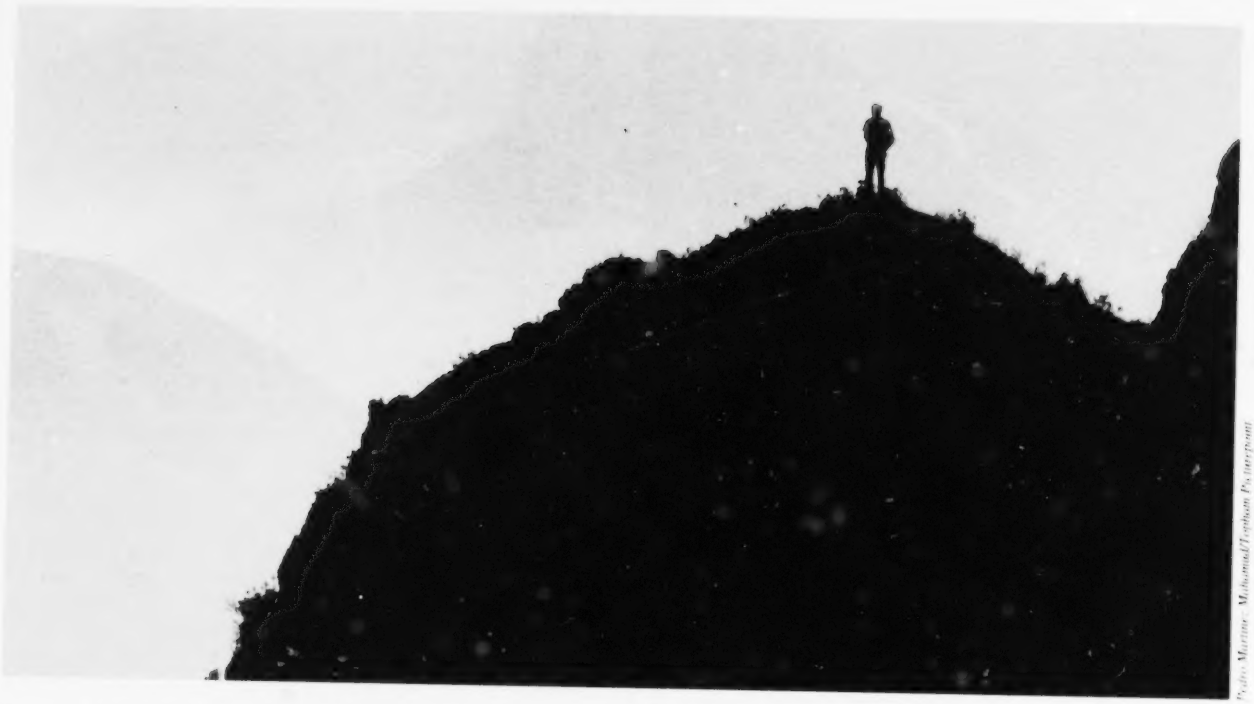
- TUI itself. Every TUI company, and every segment in each company, has to be environmentally responsible. Every member of staff is expected to come forward with ideas, because protection of the environment is everyone's individual responsibility. Hotels belonging to the TUI group have gained numerous 'green awards' over the years.
- The governments and administrations of the host countries.
- International and national public and private organizations responsible for tourism and environment.
- Those with responsibility in regional and local councils.
- Our business partners – hoteliers, airlines, car rental companies, incoming agencies, travel agencies.
- Our guests, whom we want to win over to an ecological orientation and who expect corresponding efforts from us.

TUI attaches great importance to informing its guests about the environment. All our catalogues, with a total print-run of over 30 million copies, provide important ecological information on the condition of nature and the environment in 150 holiday regions worldwide, and the ecological operations of selected and monitored hotels in all our holiday regions. This information is intended to help guests choose their destination and hotel so that they arrive with realistic expectations.

More than 10,000 holiday hotels and apartment houses are monitored every year using TUI environmental checklists. The records of the data are documented, analyzed and processed over seven years for contracting hotels and travel agents and for the descriptions in the catalogues. This shows ▶

TUI's practical activities in working for the sustainable development of tourism:

- Reducing environmental impact by boosting eco-efficiency – in energy consumption, water consumption, land use and nature use – in thousands of holiday hotels. TUI's own hotels play a pioneering role here.
- Integrating environmental quality standards and social standards into total quality management concepts and actively implementing them.
- Supporting a graduated policy of conserving nature and landscape in holiday regions, with firmly defined regulations on how to protect and use them. TUI uses the number of protected areas in each region as one of its key ecological criteria for determining the quality of holidays.
- Supporting and promoting holiday regions as candidates for recognition as UNESCO biosphere reserves: Menorca, Lanzarote and Coto Doñana are positive examples.
- Supporting measures to restore overused holiday zones to nature, including measures for 'restoring value' by a strategy of 'protection through use'. This combines nature protection and adding economic value through compatible ways of utilizing the areas.
- Supporting communities and regions – such as Calvia in Mallorca, the Alps and the Caribbean – in implementing the development processes of local Agenda 21s.
- Actively promoting the harmonization of local, communal and regional needs in concerted regional tourism development programmes, according to strictly controlled master plans.
- Supporting all measures that help provide the sensible management of visitors such as controlling their flow and regulations on the appropriate numbers for particular areas at any one time.
- Cooperating and participating with all those involved in tourism – tour operators, carriers, service providers, public authorities, environment associations/non-governmental organizations and the local populace – in common projects and 'round tables'.
- Considering financing plans and assistance jointly with such institutions as the World Bank, the Global Environment Facility and the European Commission, and with the public and private sectors (e.g. public/private partnerships).



how ecological quality standards are realized in practice in 166 holiday hotels with a total of 80,000 beds – belonging to six subsidiary companies and TUI brands; the economic and ecological benefits that result; and the impact they have on client satisfaction. We have proof of the beneficial influence of continuous environmental improvement in contracting hotels.

The special Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Industry provides a ready-made framework... enabling tourism to grow in an ecologically sustainable way

We also support all moves towards 'eco-labelling', such as ISO14001 for the 'Blue Flag'. We naturally inform our business partners in international holiday hotels that do not belong to the TUI group of our experiences in putting ecological quality standards into practice in our hotels.

Environmental network

The TUI Environment Department represents a unique Corporate Competence Centre. This communicates advisory and support services to the entire TUI group, with more than 100 associated companies, according to defined ecological criteria for destinations, holiday hotels and transport. The worldwide TUI Environmental Network brings together thousands of our staff members, contracting partners, environmentalists, national tourist boards and information bureaux and environment associations, in reporting and solving problems to relieve the environment and improve the quality of tourism.

The findings that result from TUI's worldwide environmental monitoring are presented to tourism managers in local and regional seminars and conferences – and are directed to regional and national governments in the form of 'recommendations'.

The Environment Department has developed an environmental management system, which follows up local environmental activities in the resort areas and source markets as well as taking regional, international and global relations into account. Since participating in the World Conference on Sustainable Tourism in Lanzarote in April 1995 the group has continued its environmental policy in accordance with Agenda 21, seizing many opportunities in cooperation with UNEP. It played a part in preparing for the Berlin Declaration on Biological Diversity and Sustainable Tourism in March 1997 and presented its ecological ideas and measures at the Fourth Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Bratislava in May 1998. It also contributed to the dialogue at the UNEP/WTO Conference on Sustainable Tourism in Small Island Developing States in Lanzarote in October 1998.

Guiding star

The special Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Industry provides a ready-made framework for developing and implementing measures for enabling tourism to grow in an ecologically sustainable way. The group cooperates with the WTO and the World Travel & Tourism Council, which give considerable support. It finds cooperation with the tourism industry's national associations equally fruitful. The Federal Association of the German Tourism Industry is prominent among these: it has provided a common Environmental Declaration advocating sustainable development as a guiding star for those in charge of the tourism industry in Germany •

Dr. Ralf Corsten is Chairman of the Executive Board of Touristik Union International, Hannover, Germany.

Change in the AIR

Reinhard Janke/Still Pictures

COLIN MARSHALL says that airlines must constantly try to improve their impact on the environment, and describes his own company's efforts

Aviation, I firmly believe, has a key part to play in the future protection of the environment. Such issues as climate change raise serious questions for all of us, but particularly for energy-intensive industries such as aviation, which makes a small but identifiable contribution to man's impact on the global climate.

Airlines, such as British Airways, must strive to meet ever-higher standards of environmental performance. The need to be a good citizen and neighbour within the communities we serve has always been important to us.

In 1989, recognizing the growing importance of this area, a small group, Environment Branch, was established within the company to bring a focus to the growing number and complexity of environmental issues facing the airline. In 1990 we published a statement of environmental policy and the findings of an external review of our facilities and operations. An environmental management system (EMS) was developed in advance of such standard systems as the International Organization for Standardization ISO14001. Elements of this include: an internal Environment Council to review policy and programmes on a regular basis; focal points in areas with the potential for environmental impact; working groups in key departments; and a network of environmental champions built up across the airline. A comprehensive training programme was introduced in 1994. This system has continued to develop, latterly using the ISO14001 system as a benchmark, and is still under ongoing review.

We have grouped the environmental challenges facing us under five categories:

- **Noise.**
- **Emissions and fuel efficiency.**
- **Waste of energy, water and material.**
- **Congestion in the air and on the ground.**
- **Tourism and conservation.**

These headings have proved to be robust and our environmental programmes have, accordingly, been deployed under them.

British Airways is currently committed to spending more than $5 billion on new, quieter aircraft. Our flight crew review their operational procedures on a regular basis in order to identify opportunities to reduce noise impact. Recently, for instance, we changed the departure procedures for 747-400 aircraft after a joint study with the British Airports Authority (BAA). Significant and stretching targets have been set for night flights and for keeping to the defined departure tracks. ▶

While government has the key role in proposing and implementing regulations, we have made several constructive suggestions for other ways in which noise impact might be reduced.

Fuel efficiency in the air has doubled over the last 20 years and this trend will continue. Through key suppliers in engine and airframe manufacturing, huge reductions in emissions of hydrocarbons and carbon monoxide have been achieved, and there are technological fixes which could reduce emissions of nitrogen oxides. On the ground, there is a clear record of continuous improvement in energy consumption and targets have been set for further improvement, including the use of renewable energy, which I am sure will play a more important role in the future.

I was asked last year by the British Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, to review the use of energy in business*. British Airways accepts the review's findings, including the possible role of economic instruments.

Waste management

We are all familiar with the problem of waste, and airlines are no exception. Tight procedures have been put in place for managing different types of waste. Regular surveys are carried out on all fuel storage facilities and ground is monitored to pick up any contamination. The majority of our waste at Heathrow and Gatwick is sent to an incineration plant with energy recovery, which certainly seems the best option, at least in the medium term. A wide range of recycling programmes has been so successful that last year we were able to donate some $80,000, all generated by recycling, to over 150 charities nominated by our staff.

Congestion in the air is a major problem. At Heathrow and Gatwick alone, British Airways burns some 50,000 tonnes of fuel each year – enough to keep 25,000 cars on the road – because of congestion delays. Better air traffic management and movement systems must be developed to alleviate it. There will also have to be investments made in new facilities such as Terminal 5 at Heathrow where the lack of availability of stands contributes to delays, particularly in the early morning.

Fuel efficiency in the air has doubled over the last 20 years and this trend will continue

© David Parker/Still Pictures

It is no less essential to address congestion on the ground where jammed traffic delays passengers and employees alike. We therefore supported the new Heathrow Express mass transit rail service and feasibility studies on a number of other possible rail initiatives. More immediately, a Free Transport Zone has been established at Heathrow for employees and public, with buses linking together our main working locations and the wider public transport network.

Leisure travel is the fastest growing part of our business. Indeed, every airline passenger is a tourist within the accepted definition. Tourism clearly has the potential to damage the built, cultural and natural environments and it is incumbent on the industry to accept its part of the responsibility for conservation. As part of that industry we have developed two programmes. One, the British Airways Tourism for Tomorrow Awards, recognizes environmentally responsible tourism projects and developments around the world. Through the seven years that I have been associated with the Awards, our independent judges have noted a marked improvement in the quality of the entries. I believe this shows that industry efforts such as our Awards, the Green Globe programme of the World Travel & Tourism Council, the International Hotels Environmental Initiative (IHEI) and several others, have had a significant impact.

Partnerships

Our other outreach programme, British Airways Assisting Conservation, works through travel awards to those in the front line of conservation and environmental management, with specific partnerships with such leading organizations as the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, and the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew, the Natural History Museum, the World Land Trust and the Royal Geographical Society in the United Kingdom. Started by one of our own engineers, Rod Hall, this programme has a history of wonderful stories in developing conservation alongside concern for local communities.

British Airways Holidays, our tour operator subsidiary, provides some 250,000 holidays each year, and has developed an environmental programme specifically aimed at customers. *Ecoguides* have been prepared for some 40 separate destinations. In the Caribbean, the

Reinhard Janke/Still Pictures

I believe that aviation has a vital part to play in sustainable development through its role as an essential part of the world's communication system

Seychelles and Mauritius, detailed environmental audits of hotels have been carried out, with the best identified in the brochures. For five years a Traveller Donation scheme has operated which contributes some $170,000 a year to a range of conservation programmes such as 'Venice in Peril' and 'Manatees in Florida'. British Airways Holidays gives its own Tourism for Tomorrow Award. Next year, in cooperation with IHEI, it will go to the best siting and development of a hotel.

Customers are only one group of stakeholders in British Airways. Staff, shareholders, communities around airports and other groups have a legitimate interest in our activities. Realizing the importance of communication, we were one of the first companies in the United Kingdom to publish an open review of environmental performance. An *Annual Environmental Report* has been published each year since 1992. The airline takes a prominent role in discussions on environmental issues within consultative groups at our main operating centres, particularly Heathrow and Gatwick. British Airways representatives have also played a leading part in interfaces between the industry and government institutions at the national, European and global levels. The airline's environmental programmes have been recognized by a number of organizations including the United Kingdom's Environmental Report Award (Association of Chartered and Certified Accountants) on two occasions and in 1998 by the Environmental Stewardship Award from the Council of Economic Priorities as well as Distinction in the Green Globe Achievement Awards.

Bringing people together

While, clearly, an airline will find it difficult to satisfy everybody's vision of a sustainable organization, I believe that aviation has a vital part to play in sustainable development through its role as an essential part of the world's communication system. No other industry can match its ability to bring people together, whether it be for the essential eye-to-eye contact that is necessary for successful business deals, the face-to-face meetings between friends and family, or visits to different parts of the built, social and natural environment that are so high on the list of human aspirations.

We shall take an active part in the debate on sustainability; recognizing that it may be that travellers will have to pay more. After all, from which industry other than tourism can the funds be raised to support the communities concerned with conservation?•

Lord Marshall of Knightsbridge is Chairman of British Airways.

* *Economic instruments and the business use of energy*, a report by Lord Marshall to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, November 1998.

BEYOND attractive destinations

D. J. DE VILLIERS describes how sustainable tourism can both reduce poverty and become the most important economic incentive for environmental protection

Tourism – soundly, responsibly and sustainably developed – can become a powerful force for creating more jobs, combating poverty and, simultaneously, protecting the natural and cultural environment.

As we approach the new millennium, questions about the harm done to our planet during this century provide cause enough for serious reflection and debate. The 178 nations attending the 1992 Earth Summit accepted Agenda 21 as a *Magna Carta* for sustainable development, ushering in a new vision of the world, in which environment, development and poverty are no longer regarded as separate and unrelated.

This year's meeting of the Commission on Sustainable Development has special significance. In April 1995, a World Conference on Sustainable Tourism, held in Lanzarote and co-hosted by the World Tourism Organization, adopted a *Charter* asserting that tourism development should be based on criteria of sustainability: 'It must be ecologically sound in the long term, economically viable, as well as ethically and socially equitable for the local communities.' The *Charter on Sustainable Tourism* stresses the vital importance of recognizing that protected areas cannot long co-exist with communities that are hostile to them. It also acknowledges that local people are important stakeholders with whom managers of protected areas must seek to cooperate.

Challenges to be met

The challenges identified by both the Earth Summit and the Conference on Sustainable Tourism loom as large as ever. This is particularly true of sub-Saharan Africa, the region where I have my roots.

Julio Etchart/Still Pictures

The world is experiencing the most rapid increase in human population ever witnessed. Africa has the world's highest fertility rate and the lowest prevalence of contraceptive use. In sub-Saharan Africa, fertility has only just begun to decline, and then only in certain countries. The region's fertility rate stood at 6.7 in 1960, and was still at 6.4 in the early 1990s.

High population growth increases demands for water, food, energy, housing, employment, medical services and education. Economic development is urgently needed to foster growth and employment, alleviate poverty and raise hopes for the future. Tourism has proved to be a powerful vehicle in providing countries, particularly poor ones, with the resources they badly need to reduce their debts and pay for their imports. It has the potential to create jobs without the long lead times needed for major capital projects – and it is most accessible to young people, women and small entrepreneurs.

Tourism is an important engine of economic growth and job creation. The industry continues to expand faster than average world economic growth, as disposable income and free time increase in developed countries. By the year 2020, a recent report by the World Tourism Organization (*Tourism: 2020 Vision*) forecasts that there will be 1.6 billion international tourist arrivals, compared to the 613 million recorded in 1997.

Taking nature into account

Sustainability concerns both tourism's effect on the environment and the distribution of its economic and social costs and benefits. The challenge is to convince decision makers that (like all other human development initiatives) tourism cannot continue to grow unless they consider the impact it may have on nature's life-supporting systems – the ecological processes that form the climate, clean the air and water, regulate water flows, recycle essential elements such as nitrogen and oxygen, create and regenerate soil and generally keep the planet fit for life.

We depend on the Earth's resources to sustain our lives – from the most basic requirements, such as air, water and food, through to the materials we use for shelter, transport, job opportunities and recreation. Most of the Earth's ▶

Mark Carwardine/Still Pictures

Tourism has probably become the single most important incentive for environmental protection

resources are renewable. But they cannot be stretched beyond certain limits: they cannot be depleted to less than critical levels or consumed faster than they can regenerate or reproduce themselves. They must be utilized sustainably if we are to continue reaping their benefits.

Far too few people seem to understand the importance of environmental conservation. There is a widespread perception that those who plead for it are anti-development and anti-tourism. That perception is wrong. The way to provide for the growing needs of people (and for the increasing numbers of tourists) lies in sustainable development. It will involve securing a broader environmental base to cater for the numbers of people that the future will thrust upon us, and their needs.

Common ground

We need to convince governments and decision makers at all levels, as well as the general public – and particularly the members of poor and deprived communities – that this is not an elitist subject. Ways must be found to help society understand that there is a complex interaction between poverty, human population growth, economic development and environmental degradation. If we can succeed in this, we will move environmental conservation from the perceived realm of the privileged to centre-stage in the lives of the under-privileged, to whom it is even more crucial.

Impoverished and overcrowded rural communities have no alternative but to impair, and eventually destroy, the common resource base on which their survival depends. Africa's forests, woodlands, grasslands, soil and estuaries have been caught up in an accelerating spiral of degradation, a cascading series of environmental catastrophes. These, in turn, have seriously depleted and damaged surface and groundwater sources, thereby exacerbating human deprivation.

The continent must find appropriate forms of development that will break the vicious cycle of poverty, population growth and the degradation of renewable resources – and reduce the continent's rapidly increasing environmental debt. Impassioned and idealistic campaigns will not halt the loss of Africa's natural wealth or unique biodiversity. Such crusades have no relevance to those who live in poverty. Development programmes that add economic value to the environment stand a much better chance of being accepted by disadvantaged communities. Developing sustainable tourism affords a splendid opportunity to meet people's material needs, while facilitating the preservation of the environment.

Tourism has probably become the single most important economic incentive for environmental protection. It is a dynamic, market-led phenomenon.

Wise and forward-looking planning will be needed to optimize the economic impact of tourism, create new jobs and continue the fight against poverty, while protecting and enhancing the natural and cultural environment. Governments will have to rethink their role in setting guidelines and policies suited to enhancing the development of sustainable tourism. They will have to reach beyond their traditional commitment to promoting and marketing their countries as attractive destinations. Only governments can produce the policies needed to achieve balanced and sustainable tourism development. Then, hand in hand with the private sector, they should implement and enforce them – using planning guidelines, building regulations, density limits and other tools.

If governments neglect or abdicate their responsibility to provide for sound and sustainable tourism development, destinations will be nibbled away by special interests with scant regard for the environment or communities' socio-economic needs. The benefits will be short term, and will be eroded, over time, by negative impacts. Neither the quest for more jobs nor the fight against poverty will be advanced. Many examples across the world demonstrate how the lack of proper land use and planning policy has created developmental chaos and depleted fragile resources.

Governments cannot escape responsibility for protecting the Earth's fragile resources. This is closely linked to population growth, poverty and quality of life – the main challenges facing us as we approach the next millennium•

Dr. D. J. de Villiers is Deputy Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization, and a former minister for tourism of the Republic of South Africa.

No island *is an* island

CARLSTON BOUCHER describes the importance of tourism in making the economies of small island states outward looking

Small island developing states must orientate their national development policies outwards to the rest of the world. This is an imperative, not an option. Their narrow range of resources, the constraints imposed by their small populations and land areas, and their limited technical capacity demand it. The lure of tourism to them stems from its natural comparative advantage over other potential sectors of the economy.

As per capita incomes steadily rise, tourism has become the largest industry in the global economy. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), it accounts for 11.5 per cent of the world's GDP and 12.5 per cent of its employment. Small island states have long benefited from this growth: in some Caribbean nations, for example, tourism employs as much as 25 per cent of the workforce, contributes some 30 per cent of GDP, and provides the bulk of foreign exchange earnings.

A competitive sector

Tourism is expected to go on growing by some 5 per cent a year. World Tourism Organization (WTO) projections suggest that international arrivals will soar from 594 million in 1996 to 700 million in the year 2000, and 1 billion in 2010. The vast majority of tourists will continue to come from the developed world, but it is not too far-fetched to imagine that economic expansion and per capita income growth in populous developing countries – such as Brazil, China and India – will, over the long term, provide considerable impetus to the upward trend. This outlook makes tourism one of the most competitive sectors of the global economy.

In order to enhance the long-term viability of this critical sector, many small island developing states have embarked on forward-looking strategies to improve efficiency and strengthen coordination through such regional mechanisms as the Caribbean Tourism Organization and the Tourism Council of the South Pacific. Specific measures in the proposed Sustainable Tourism and Development Plan for the Caribbean include:

- **Fostering common definitions and measurement criteria for sustainable tourism so as to effect quality control within the industry.**
- **Expanding facilities for training and sharing information.**
- **Upgrading marketing strategies and deepening tourism research.**
- **Creating the necessary enabling environment for tourism development through market-based incentives and appropriate regulatory frameworks.**
- **Linking tourism directly to the islands' cultural and ecological assets.**

The movement towards a more holistic approach to the link between tourism and development owes much to the work of the WTO. It also received a major boost from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio in 1992, and the Global Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in Barbados in 1994, which examined the development of tourism within the ▸

Mark Edwards/Still Pictures

broader context of sustainability. The implementation of agreements from such global conferences often falls short of expectations, but they have a great impact on raising consciousness of issues of international concern as they foster a vital consensus for national and global action.

Coordinating concerns

The preparatory process for the SIDS Conference produced a vast inventory of research and information-sharing on all aspects of the development problematique of small island states. It fostered critical review and coordination of the issues among concerned groups, including civil society. And it raised the level of commitment to national objectives and ownership of them. This would otherwise have been difficult to achieve. The Conference's main outcome, the Barbados Programme of Action – which was endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly – outlines the strategies and policy actions required at national, regional and international levels to meet the challenge of sustainable development of small island states. It recognized tourism among 14 areas identified for priority action, alongside such other key resources as land, energy and biodiversity.

Gil Moti/Still Pictures

SIDS have focused on upgrading the quality of their tourism product

Their limited development options – and heavy dependence on this fragile sector – make SIDS particularly vulnerable. They are at risk both from economic dislocations in the tourists' home countries, and from such environmental shocks as hurricanes or other natural hazards, which can quickly wipe out the progress built up over many years. Economic diversification may provide a desirable buffer to such eventualities – but it is likely to be a medium-term option for only a few.

Conscious of the industry's competitive climate, SIDS have increasingly focused on upgrading the quality of their tourism product – and on emphasizing its uniqueness through niche marketing of ecotourism and nature and cultural tourism. They have also given special attention to improving the management and protection of tourism assets, disposing of wastes and combating land degradation.

The Barbados Programme of Action will be reviewed at a Special Session of the General Assembly in September 1999. This will provide a timely opportunity to assess how well it is being implemented and, particularly, identify what can be done to improve things in those priority areas where only limited progress has been made. The Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) will act as the Preparatory Committee for this review at its seventh session in April 1999, when it will consider tourism and oceans, both specially important to small island developing states.

Coasts and oceans

Oceans are the life-line of tourism. So SIDS are very concerned with the sustainable management, use and protection of coastal and ocean resources. They follow with particular concern such activities as the regional and global conventions and protocols relating to the Law of the Sea, the International Coral Reef Initiative, the Climate Change Convention, the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities, and the trans-shipment of nuclear wastes through the fragile marine ecosystems of such international waters as the Caribbean Sea.

The CSD will share national experiences, especially in implementing strategies to integrate environmental and social considerations into the concept of sustainable tourism. This new focus, defined by the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, offers guiding principles that apply to all SIDS: 'Sustainable tourism development is the optimal use of natural and cultural resources for national development on an equitable and self-sustaining basis to provide a unique visitor experience, and an improved quality of life through partnerships among governments, the private, and local communities.'

Sharing information

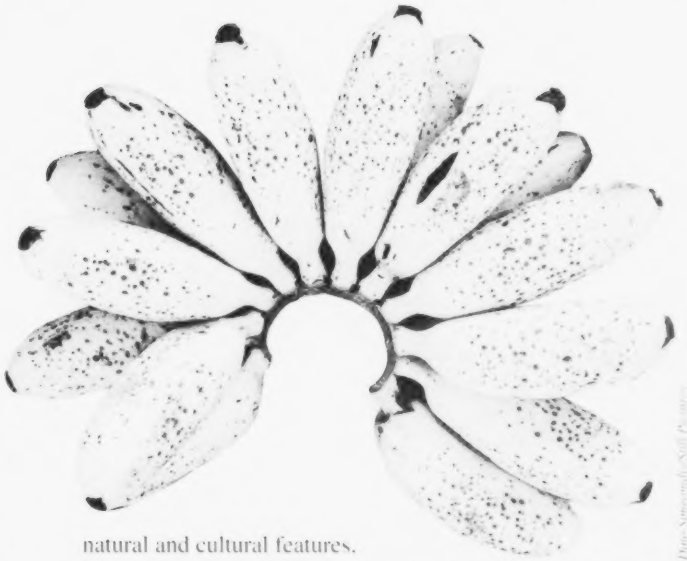
This approach aims at forging links with a wide variety of stakeholders in such areas as the environment, health, agriculture and culture, the private sector, trade unions and local communities – consistent with the pervasive impact of tourism in SIDS. Sharing information and coordinating institutions will be critical in managing this outreach, but timely support is now available through the Small Island Developing States Network (SIDSnet): this Internet-based facility, developed by the United Nations Development Programme in close collaboration with the Alliance of Small Island States, promotes the exchange of information on the environment and sustainable development among 42 island developing states in the Pacific, Caribbean, Indian and African regions.

This embracing concept of tourism holds much promise. But implementing it effectively will largely depend on whether tourist bodies in SIDS have the organizational capacity to make these partnerships work. Building this capacity may well be one of the most fruitful areas for international assistance •

H.E. Carlston Boucher is Vice-Chairman of the Alliance of Small Island States and Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Barbados to the United Nations.

BEYOND BANANAS

NORRIS PREVOST says that tourism, properly developed, can transform economies and bring enormous benefits to small island states and developing countries as a whole



Travel and tourism has been acclaimed as the world's largest industry and generator of jobs. The work it provides through hotels, restaurants, car rentals, taxi operators and tour guides is obvious enough. But the many less obvious jobs which it creates – through the linkages to agriculture, renewal of urban and rural communities, cultural revitalization and heritage preservation – are even more critically important to developing economies.

Tourism can be like a rising tide for developing countries. It has the potential to float every boat. It can be the driving force of activity in every sector of the economy: agriculture, industry, construction, transport and infrastructure development, as well as education, sports, culture and entertainment. A growing tourism industry serves to drive local demand and expand the local market in every single sector.

This high propensity to create wealth in diverse economic sectors – and to distribute it among all strata of the population – has been one of tourism's most compelling attractions. It has led governments and economists of the South to adopt it as a focal sector for diversifying their economies, which have historically depended on producing primary raw materials, often just a single crop. It generates high-paying jobs across the spectrum. And intensive central investment in tourism facilities has the indirect effect of creating opportunities for the sustainable development of hundreds of small- and medium-sized ancillary businesses, which are not capital-intensive, in a variety of fields.

But it would be a terrible mistake for us in the South to regard tourism as an alternative to competitive agriculture or to the value-added production of other goods and services. We must see it as a growing sector in a competitive global marketplace. It needs to meet the challenges of globalization.

The tourism market is not dominated by comparative advantage, exclusively driven by economies of scale, patented technology and low wages. Instead, natural and cultural features, knowledge, the social environment and product differentiation all give rise to their own niche markets.

The Caribbean has been one of the world's most successful regions in using tourism for transforming its economies, improving its social and physical infrastructure and increasing its people's quality of life.

Research conducted by the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) shows that travel and tourism in the Caribbean – which is supported by some $15.4 billion of capital investment – is expected to have generated $32.5 billion of economic activity in 1998. It will have contributed 24.7 per cent of the region's GDP and accounted for 25.1 per cent of its direct and indirect employment. In addition, and very important to the Caribbean Governments, travel and tourism is expected to have produced $7.8 billion in revenue – 25.9 per cent of the total taxes they collect – while only receiving in return $2.0 billion – 19.8 per cent of government operating expenditures.

The WTTC also says that Caribbean travel and tourism is expected to grow at 6.3 per cent per annum – or 108.2 per cent in real terms – between 1998 and 2010. Is this sustainable? Rather, what must be done to sustain this level of economic activity without consuming the natural and ▸

> **"Dominica is a small island state with a fragile vulnerable economic base, and very limited development options. Rapid global changes in world trade rules, and drastic cutbacks in economic aid to the region make it imperative that Dominica moves from an economy based almost exclusively on primary agricultural production to one which takes full advantage of opportunities provided by technology and the services sector"**
>
> *The Hon. Edison James, Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Dominica. Address to the First Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) Conference on Sustainable Tourism held in Roseau, Dominica in May 1997.*

cultural environment – the very core product on which it depends? These questions were addressed at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, which produced Agenda 21.

In 1996, the WTTC, the World Tourism Organization and the Earth Council joined to launch an action plan entitled Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Industry: Towards Sustainable Development. Regional seminars were held in London and Jakarta in 1997 to increase awareness of the programme and to adapt it for local implementation. And a Think Tank Seminar on Agenda 21 for Travel and Tourism was held in the Caribbean from 3-5 December, 1998 on the small, 945 square-kilometre island of Dominica, between the French islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe.

Formerly a British colony, and now an independent state of the CARICOM region, Dominica is the last Caribbean island to have preserved a vast amount of its rainforests. In all, 21 per cent of its area is legally protected as wildlands within its National Park and Forest Reserve System. In December 1997 UNESCO deemed Dominica's Trois Pitons National Park – once described as 'a priceless living laboratory where scientists can study tropical biology in a primitive state' – to be of universal importance to mankind, and therefore listed it as a World Heritage Site. Dominica is also the home of the last remaining indigenous Carib people of the islands of the Caribbean.

Developing countries must focus on using their indigenous music, exotic foods, culture, art and crafts, and on adding value to them

Economic transformation

In 1996, the Government of Dominica and Green Globe entered into an agreement to develop Dominica as the Caribbean's first Green Globe Destination. It has a population of just under 80,000 people of which 3,500 are Caribs, and attracts some 68,000 stay-over visitors. With its 700 hotel rooms, mostly in cottage type hotels of under 50 rooms, its World Heritage Site, some world-class diving sites and a growing reputation as the Nature Island of the Caribbean, Dominica is emerging from its wilderness onto the tourism highway. It hopes, through tourism, to transform its banana economy to a more sustainable level.

The statement of the Prime Minister, the Hon. Edison James, quoted on page 15, could apply to all small island developing states and succinctly encapsulates the realities of the South. The Government's strategy, as laid out in its

Judy Rogers-Christian Aid/Still Pictures

Topham Picturepoint

official policy, 'is aimed at maximizing the benefits of tourism without compromising our social values, while ensuring the preservation of our environment and ecosystems.'

If they are to achieve these objectives, developing countries must focus on using their indigenous music, exotic foods, culture, art and crafts, and on adding value to them. And they must similarly preserve and restore indigenous architecture, natural heritage and the environment.

Tourism must become a matter of national pride for each citizen. Each developing country, no matter how small or how vast, must aim at becoming a world-class tourist destination for its quality, service and value for money. And each country must have a dynamic positive and comprehensive Tourism and Hospitality Education Agenda in place to underpin these goals.

Early payback, long-term investment

The task ahead is enormous, the challenge to developing countries as they seek to achieve world competitiveness in tourism is staggering. The South cannot do it alone. Private sector investment will go a long way in establishing those tourism facilities and infrastructures which demonstrate that they will produce an early payback. But gigantic sums will also have to be invested in long-term sustainable projects for restoring and preserving the environment, and in upgrading facilities for health and education and the services needed for the world-class competitive tourism standards that will have to be achieved. Ensuring the sustainability of local economies and peoples must be at the core of any strategy.

North-South economic cooperation must now place tourism on a top-priority agenda. The sentiments so eloquently and passionately articulated at the Rio Earth Summit of 1992 must be backed up by a flow of financial resources to implement sustainable travel and tourism activities in the economies of the South. The valves of the Global Environment Facility must be opened up to allow the resources to flow smoothly.

The lessons from our painful experiences in agriculture, mining and industrialization must not be dissipated. Now is the moment – and tourism is the opportunity. The North must seize this moment to do things right this time around•

The Hon. Norris Prevost is Minister of Tourism of the Commonwealth of Dominica, and Chairman of the Caribbean Tourism Organization's Committee on Sustainable Tourism Development.

REEFS *and reforms*

NELSON ANDRADE describes UNEP's work to promote sustainable tourism in the Caribbean

Jeffrey Rotman/Still Pictures

Just over a quarter of the coastlines of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean are potentially highly threatened with degradation from coastal development; just under a further quarter face a moderate threat. The growth of tourism is cited as one cause of increasing stress; others include domestic sewage, coastal erosion, industrial waste, mining and the run-off of sediment.

Tourism has long been recognized as an important part of the social and economic development of the Wider Caribbean. It depends heavily on the health of the region's marine and coastal ecosystems and of the living resources that inhabit them. Caribbean coastal areas enjoy unique levels of biodiversity: a high proportion of species are native ones. The Caribbean hosts the largest barrier reef in the Western Hemisphere, stretching some 220 kilometres long, off Belize, and is home to almost 60 per cent of the world's scuba diving tours.

Need for integration

The Caribbean tourist industry has grown rapidly over the last decade. In 1996, it received 25.5 million visitors – of which 10.7 million were passengers on cruises. This growth has shown that tourism must be more integrated into planning and management.

Crowded SHORES

LUCIEN CHABASON describes the impact of tourism around the Mediterranean

The framework of UNEP's Regional Seas Programme lends itself particularly well to examining the relationship between tourism and sustainable development. Many of these seas are popular tourist destinations, receiving a massive influx of visitors. This is particularly true – and has long been so – for the Mediterranean, where tourism is a major challenge, with a significant economic, social and environmental impact.

The Blue Plan, one of the elements of the Mediterranean Action Plan, has highlighted the main trends of tourism in the Mediterranean Basin. This work has served as a basis for the activities of the Tourism Group of the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development (MCSD) whose conclusions were presented and adopted at meetings in Antalya (Turkey), and Monaco in September and October 1998.

Region-wide benefits

In 1990, 135 million tourists stayed in the Mediterranean coastal regions, including 75 million from abroad – mostly from European countries – representing around 16 per cent of all international tourism. Nearly all the countries in the region benefit from the growth in international tourism, if to varying degrees. It accounts, for example, for more than 8 per cent of Spain's GDP, 7.5 per cent in Tunisia, 7 per cent in Greece, 22 per cent in Cyprus and up to 24 per cent in Malta.

The MCSD has also found that the proportion of international tourists compared with the permanent population of the coast has risen continually in the region since 1980 – reaching 299 per cent in Malta. Foreign currency earnings from tourism contribute substantially to the balance of payments, going a long way to compensate for trade deficits. In Tunisia, for example, it covers some 70 to 80 per cent of the deficit, though the precise figure varies from year to year. In Turkey, foreign currency earnings from tourism represented 25 per cent of all exports in 1997.

But there are huge discrepancies between countries in the amount of

Sustainable tourism development requires the adoption of sound environmental practices. Coordinated approaches are needed to resolve conflicts over resources, involving all stakeholders. Information must be shared, instruction materials made available and incentives provided.

Better information is needed about the carrying capacity of ecosystems and the impacts of tourism

The direct and detrimental impacts of tourism are usually known, but have not been quantified. So better information is needed about the carrying capacity of ecosystems, the impacts of tourism on them – and the benefits gained from environmentally sound practices.

Promoting sound management

Governments in the region established the Caribbean Environment Programme (CEP) in 1981 as an integral part of UNEP's Regional Seas Programme, to conserve and promote sound management of the marine environment. Through a regional coordinating unit in Kingston, Jamaica, UNEP functions as Secretariat for the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols, as the Caribbean's only regional environmental treaty.

The CEP has embarked on a project to support and improve environmental practices in the tourism industry in the region. The Caribbean Environmental Network project is aimed at achieving the optimal use and maintenance of coastal and marine resources as part of a sustainable tourism strategy. A joint venture with the United States Agency for International Development in Jamaica, it is designed to improve the quality of the environment and protect resources in the Wider Caribbean by promoting the use of environmentally sound practices by the tourism industry and reducing its impacts. To this end, the CEP has developed close partnerships with key organizations, involved in many aspects of tourism, from the private, public and academic sectors in the region.

Among its activities to support the development of tourism as an environmentally sustainable industry are:

- Promoting best management practices and applying clean technologies within the tourism industry, particularly the hotel sector.
- Implementing training programmes, with associated manuals, to strengthen the capacity of people in the tourism industry to manage solid wastes and wastewater, contribute to integrated coastal area management and to site and design tourist facilities appropriately.
- Implementing pilot demonstration studies on minimizing the impact of tourism development in the coastal and marine environment.
- Producing publications like booklets, manuals and technical reports on key topics of interest for disseminating in the tourism industry, and thus building awareness.

Other regional organizations have also begun programmes to improve the environmental practices of the tourism industry. The CEP contributes to these efforts to promote tourism as an industry that is not just environmentally, but also economically and socially, sustainable •

Nelson Andrade is Coordinator of UNEP's Caribbean Environment Programme.

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revenue gained and jobs created, and inequality in the development of tourism. France, Italy and Spain together account for 80 per cent of revenue from the region's international tourism. But countries like Tunisia and Turkey have witnessed a very rapid growth in the last 20 years. Revenue from tourism accounted for 25 per cent of Turkey's exports in 1997, and 60 per cent of the Balearic Islands' GDP.

This growth creates large numbers of jobs and halts emigration, but also changes traditional societies, introducing them to often very different ways of life and consumption models, and transforming the social use of space.

Immediate impact

The impact of tourism on the environment and landscape is very dramatic at first glance. Shorelines are destroyed by new infrastructures, marinas and urban expansion, and by the increase in population (with its ▸

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Yorkum Participant

need for wastewater and waste disposal) and the pressure on water resources. Outstanding habitats, like dunes, are degraded. A very fast pace of development can aggravate this. The Mediterranean islands provide a physical illustration of the problem of overloading: this appears to be a core issue of sustainable development, although this has been disputed.

Demands for quality

But tourism can have positive environmental effects. Tourist demands for a quality environment, especially for clean bathing water, are a powerful lever for improving water purification facilities and solid waste disposal in popular areas. There is a growing trend towards diversification as tourists discover the region and nature through ecotourism.

In 1998, the MCSD carried out 21 in-depth case studies of a representative sample of destinations, with the support of the countries, the local authorities and the relevant economic and environmental non-governmental organizations. These showed that the following should be considered when drawing up action plans to incorporate tourism into sustainable development:

Overloading appears to be a core issue of sustainable development

■ **Different treatment should be given to:**

• Old tourist development areas, which come within rehabilitation initiatives.

• Areas under development, which often require a review of existing programmes to improve control, especially of their impact on the environment.

• Quasi-greenfield areas, such as Libya and Albania, which often represent major environmental challenges: their future tourism development should be carried out with particular attention to sustainability.

■ **Special attention should be paid to the legislative framework for land use within the context of integrated coastal area management: many countries have passed laws banning construction within 100 or 200 metres of the shore. Without appropriate planning that takes environmental considerations into account, the conflicts surrounding tourism developments will only increase.**

■ **Financing environmental protection through money from tourism has led to some promising experiments. Some countries, such as France and Tunisia, have introduced public land acquisition initiatives.**

■ **Institutional and professional capacity-building to make tourism and the environment more compatible presents another major challenge, especially at local level.**

A series of recommendations on tourism and sustainable development should be adopted at the fifth session of the MCSD in Rome in June 1999. The MCSD's preliminary work will also provide substantial input to UNEP's contribution to the work of the seventh session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development •

Lucien Chabason is Coordinator of UNEP's Mediterranean Action Plan. For further information contact chabason@unepmap.gr *or* www.unepmap.org

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Not just *nature*

ELIZABETH HALPENNY and **NICOLE R. OTTE** define ecotourism and discuss its benefits and drawbacks

Ecotourism is not just a marketing gimmick. It is increasingly recognized as a tool for sustainable development. Achieving genuine ecotourism is a challenge, as high standards have to be met. But when it is achieved, communities and natural environments are the immediate beneficiaries.

Though the word 'ecotourism' has only come into common use in the last 10 years, it describes a goal towards which entrepreneurs, government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and communities have been working for more than two decades. A short definition put forward by The Ecotourism Society in 1991 describes it as 'responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people.' Professionals working within the field of ecotourism generally agree that it is characterized by:

- **Travel to a natural area.**
- **Travel that supports the conservation of biodiversity.**
- **Travel that brings benefits to local host communities.**
- **Travel that leads to greater understanding of the natural or cultural environment visited.**

Including these four components in a travel package significantly restricts the number of products that can genuinely be labelled ecotourism. Many confuse the term with nature tourism or adventure travel, but they are not the same. Rather, ecotourism is one niche market within the larger, and rapidly expanding, nature tourism market. By our estimates, nature-based tourism now comprises 20 per cent of the world travel market, and ecotourism 7 per cent.

Ecotourism is not just visits to the rainforest. It can be activities in a traveller's home country, as long as these visits are responsible and benefit conservation efforts and local communities – and the visitor has participated in some learning experience. One example might be camping at a national park, paying an entry fee, following park rules of conduct, buying supplies at a gateway community outside the park, and participating in a natural history lesson.

A crucial role

There is an encouraging 'greening' of mainstream tourism, and this trend should be supported at every opportunity. Greater sustainability in the industry as a whole will have the largest impact on overall environmental protection, and on communities and individuals. But ecotourism will play a crucial role in the communities and natural environments under the greatest pressure from development. These include rural, often indigenous communities, and 'pristine' natural environments such as coral reefs, tundra and rainforests – the destinations that ecotourists want to visit.

Daily the demand grows for these unique cultural and natural resources to be brought into the global economy. As this pressure increases, ecotourism can help make the process more beneficial, empowering communities and their resource managers with an alternative to more invasive practices.

Ecotourism, of course, is no panacea. Indeed, it introduces its own set of problems. Such impacts as cultural erosion and atmospheric pollution are ever-present, as in any tourism product. Planning and managing destinations, setting up institutional partnerships and the continued development of environmentally friendly technology will provide some solutions.

Call for interaction

Ecotourism institutions and professionals easily form alliances with their cousins in sustainable tourism, and in the larger sustainable development community, and there should be greater interaction between them. The Ecotourism Society is among the institutions working on this by bringing ecotourism professionals together and facilitating communication with other sustainable development partners such as conservation NGOs, government tourism and resource management agencies, community groups and the private sector. The Internet has been invaluable to this process, facilitating a much easier exchange of ideas, and enabling the society and other organizations to teach professionals and institutions about the field.

The time has come for a more cohesive effort within the tourism industry to make itself more sustainable. This agenda item must be given priority at all levels, not just within the ecotourism smaller niche markets•

Elizabeth Halpenny is Workshop and Marine Program Coordinator and Nicole R. Otte is Membership and Book Program Director of The Ecotourism Society, Bennington, Vermont, United States of America.

KEEP THE SHARKS *out of the mountains*

TEJ VIR SINGH argues that mass tourism is ruining the world's high places, and calls for community-based development instead

Tourism is often presumed to be a development panacea – but is in fact a queer mix of the good and the bad. The good is often associated with sustainable development policies, the bad is dubbed with mass tourism. The dilemma deepens when tourism is allowed to penetrate into vulnerable and fragile environments, like coasts, wetlands, tropical forests – and mountains. Mountains are often used as a metaphor for stability and strength, but their ecosystems are inherently weak and have limited tolerance for human activity – and above all for aggressive tourism. The higher and more remote they are the more fragile they can be.

Irreversible damage

Most economic activities strain resources, but tourism does so particularly conspicuously. There is still too little research on its impacts. A few scholars, however, have reported that poorly planned tourism development has done more harm than good. Heavy environmental costs are paid for paltry economic gains and often the damage is irreversible.

The ecology of tourism is a sad narrative of negatives – losses of flora and fauna, degradation of mountain slopes, trails polluted with garbage, eutrophied waters, overburdened landscapes and unseemly urbanization. And there are adverse social impacts, including dependency, alienation and xenophobia.

Access and beauty are, it seems, incompatible. Too much tourism has predictably often altered the landscape beyond recognition. Yet thanks to nature parks and biosphere reserves – and the philosophy behind them – we can enjoy green tourism and nature conservation and have a chance to witness the positive side of the industry. Practitioners of ecotourism are ordained to maintain the beauty and splendour of these environments, in all the gregariousness of bio-cultural diversities. These spectacular Earth-features should be carefully conserved to be passed on to posterity as the heritage of mankind, not turned into commodities to be consumed by tourism sharks.

There is more to the ethos of the mountains than can be summed up in words

Pushpa Chitrakar/Tapbum Picturepoint

Many an upland has been a cradle of human civilization. Confucius worked out his philosophies in China's sequestered Huang Shan. The Greek gods held their divine colloquia on Mount Olympus. The Hindu Vedas were conceived over the holy Himalayas. Columbia, Ecuador, Ethiopia and Tibet have been great centres of society. Their ancient mountain communities evolved lifestyles, traditions and mores which lend to excellence in cultural diversity – and some have been able to preserve this 'little mountain culture' in the face of inexorable agents of change.

Sensitive environments

There is more to the ethos of the mountains than can be summed up in words: their organic settlement patterns, distinguished by vernacular architecture; their tribal culture with their beliefs, totems and taboos; their native crafts and, above all, their people's amazing knowledge of mountain ecology make them an extraordinary environment to experience. When tourist culture abruptly invades such sensitive environments, the negative impacts are bound to outweigh the positive ones.

The degree of change will largely depend upon the type of tourism, the scale and pace of development, the philosophy behind it – and the resilience of the host community. Bhutan has been able to preserve its cultural properties and conserve its ecology with indigenous craft tourism, but the classic tradition of Himalayan pilgrimages in India's Garhwal Himalaya suffered a severe setback. The nearby Kulu Valley in Himachal Pradesh, on the other hand, reaped a good harvest by rediscovering the lost tradition of its famous Dussehra festival, restoring its bio-social resource base, rejuvenating its dwindling crafts and infusing community pride. Nepal has had its share of impacts, both good and bad. Tourism forms the backbone of its national economy, but a large proportion of its benefits leak out to lowland areas – a phenomenon common to all weak mountain economies.

Raising living standards

The Sherpas of the Khumbu region in the highest Himalaya had the best of tourism, at a time when their narrowly based economy had lost its traditional trade with the closure of Indo-Tibetan borders in the early 1960s. Trek tourism transformed and modernized their subsistence pastoral society into a cash economy, raised their standard of living and created jobs. The Sherpas of Rolwaling valley in the eastern Nepal Himalaya, had a similar experience – though their economic gains came with environmental and social costs. The community-based Annapurna Conservation Area Projects have set a model for sustainable mountain tourism development, maximizing the socio-economic gains to the host environment.

Tourism might appear to be better placed in the high mountains of Europe where ecological potential is harnessed for agricul.ure or recreational activity. But its expansion has caused agriculture to regress miserably. The result is a tourist monoculture, disastrous both to the ecology and the economy, and creating dependency.

Georgia Rivers and Lothian Photopoint

Incompatibility and conflict

The mushrooming of second homes in rural Alpine settings presents another threat to physical and social environments: most of the new settlers who migrate to them differ from the indigenous people in both behaviour and economic activity. The sky-rise structures they have constructed in scenic landscapes are visual blights, resented by Alpine communities in Tyrol (Switzerland) and Italy. A monstrous man-made environment of 'Alpinopolis' is spreading from Geneva to Vienna, and from upper Bavaria to upper Italy, deriding the Alps' majestic peaks, glades and glens. Summer and winter alike the mountain tragedy is heightened as too many humans arrive.

The conflict between ecology and economy, dependency and autonomy in mountain tourism remains unresolved. Impact studies generally take place after the event, and not much can be done to remedy the damage inflicted on the environment. The science of cybernetics is complex and self-renewing, but human artefacts impede its auto-repair system.

Ideally, such sensitive environments as mountains ought to be developed with damage prevention approaches involving host communities. Environmental impact assessments are relevant and forward-looking and can suggest better development strategies that will mitigate adverse effects.

The mountain tragedy is heightened as too many humans arrive

God does not seem to have designed mountains for people, not for too many of them anyway. Close environmental vigilance will be needed if the sustainability of rare and non-renewable resources is to be achieved – for our planet would be poorer without them •

Dr. Tej Vir Singh is Director of the Centre for Tourism Research and Development in Lucknow, India.

UGANDA'S OPPORTUNITY

SHAUN MANN says that the country, by-passed by mass tourism because of its past troubles, is now pioneering a new course

The world is littered with the social, ecological and economic debris of commercial opportunities that have been greedily seized, consumed and later abandoned. Tourism is as much to blame as any other industry. The pandemic outbreak of 'touristitis' in the last few decades has left gaping wounds in many of the world's most pristine and beautiful natural environments.

Nevertheless tourism has also become an efficacious panacea for many countries: a newly discovered cocktail of social development, commerce and foreign exchange earnings that produces huge macro-economic benefits. The general prognosis is that the wounds are acceptable as a way of promoting well-being of the 'whole'.

But here it all starts to go horribly and cumulatively wrong. Tourism is a very young industry that has grown with exponential ease. Cultured on human needs and fed by socio-economic circumstances, there has been little time or inclination for any effective critical appraisal. The excitement of tourism is all-consuming. Its power lies very firmly with ethnocentric developed world markets. Some 80 per cent of all international travellers come from just 20 countries, which control, create – and evaporate – demand for developing country products. This dependency has been thrust upon nations desperate for economic answers, but Uganda is determined to avoid it.

Last August 1998, President Museveni announced the start of a countrywide sustainable tourism programme, the culmination of two years of preparatory work by the Ministry of Tourism and the Uganda Tourist Board. He said that Uganda 'has a unique opportunity... to conceive an initiative that has sustainability at its very heart... We wish to combine ecological and social benefits with a welcome boost to our local economies and thus to the status and well-being of Uganda as a whole.'

The opportunity is this: Uganda's economic 'vital signs' are relatively stable and tourism is just a small component of an otherwise diverse revenue base. President Museveni has always been adamant that this is the way forward for the country.

Marketing is critical in this idealistic, but ultimately attainable, matrix for sustainable tourism development. If Uganda is to display its wares, it must be in the right place at the right price – and have a guarantee. So we must understand who our suppliers are, and what their capabilities and limitations are. We must know who our customers are, what they want, and how much they are prepared to pay. And we must understand what we are selling and how we are packaging it. While this may seem obvious, it is usually put into very profitable practice by transnational companies that recognize and seize such opportunities. How many governments, particularly in the developing world, have made an effort to evaluate these kinds of challenges and consequences before selling to the bidder with the biggest wallet?

Holistic foundations

Uganda is trying to redefine the expectations of tourism, and its emoluments, and to relate them to the principles of sustainability and to the realistic potential of human and environmental resources. President Museveni refers to 'the benefits that sensitive tourism development can bring to Uganda'. Holistic foundations are being prepared incorporating protected area management and development, forest resource management, rivers and lakes, community tourism, private and public sector capacity and expertise in an integrated programme. The target is to develop the number of tourists visiting these areas to the critical mass that can allow them to function without subsidies from the Government or donors – and to develop effective management capacity at the same time.

The European Union, the World Bank, the United States Agency for International Development, the United Nations Development Programme, and British, Danish and German bi-lateral aid agencies have come together for the first time in Uganda to discuss and enhance overlapping programmes. They and the Government of Uganda will be investing over

$100 million in the environment, wildlife and tourism during the next five to seven years. This, it is hoped, will assure the long-term viability of these natural and cultural resources. But these interventions have no hope of succeeding unless there is a parallel strategy for long-term funding.

Tourism is a very young industry that has grown with exponential ease

The low-key development of community tourism is a good illustration of Uganda's philosophy. The recently inaugurated Uganda Community Tourism Association (UCOTA) is being supported through its members to establish quality handicraft producers – mainly women and disabled groups – as a precursor to other more marginal revenue-earning micro-projects. The members understand that they must carry on with their bread-and-butter activities but can supplement their incomes with specific, well-chosen products that UCOTA will help market and distribute. The emphasis is on establishing UCOTA's capacity to manage its activities sustainably.

Interactive participation

Community tourism is widely promoted but seldom really works for long and usually creates more community tensions than ever existed before. By giving the power to UCOTA, rather than a range of single local communities, Uganda believes that genuine interactive participation is more likely to take place, and communities are less likely to be susceptible to manipulation.

Moving away from external dependency is at the core of sustainable tourism interventions in Uganda, and is what President Museveni means by the conception of '...an initiative that has sustainability at its very heart from the beginning.'

Some 5,000 tourists visit Uganda each year, and 10,000 or so resident expatriates participate at various times of the year in touristic activities: these two groups generate about 90 per cent of the occupancy of lodges or tented camps in protected areas. With so few tourists, revenue generation – and therefore tax collection from the industry – is fairly minimal. Only money left behind by tourist spending has any lasting benefits: this is what pays the bills and the salaries.

It was not always like this. The numbers of tourists were far greater in the late 1960s. Murchison Falls National Park, one of Uganda's 10 National Parks, alone had nearly 90,000 foreign visitors in 1969; last year there were about 7,500. Two of three huge old lodges that used to cater for these visitors now lie in the middle of the Park like crumbling Ozymandian relics.

Much has happened in Uganda since the late 1960s. Tourism numbers declined from about 110,000 in 1970 to a low of 450 in 1975; the numbers of large mammal populations were reduced by up to 95 per cent in most 'protected areas' by uncontrolled poaching and gratuitous killing by assorted militia; the economy took a massive dive into the drudgery of debt; institutions deteriorated in disarray; the transport infrastructure disintegrated and industries died. Such was the enormity of the catastrophe that it took the present Government a full decade to get inflation under control, reducing it from a staggering annual 280 per cent to an acceptable 3 per cent a year.

Undeniable opportunities

Anybody who has ever visited Uganda will attest to its tremendous and spectacular natural diversity as well as to the genuine world-class hospitality provided. There are undeniable opportunities – and the more other African destinations promote the spread of mass tourism, the more significant and rare those undeveloped natural resources will become. The internal strife in Uganda during the 1970s and 1980s and the current residual stigma have 'banked' its natural habitats as resources for the future, and allowed the country to look at its tourism opportunities from a very different perspective – starting in the 21st century and looking forward.

President Museveni points out that 'the growing international debate about what is generally called "ecotourism" has tended to focus on repairing damage caused by ill-planned schemes.' He adds that Uganda has avoided, albeit by default, exposure to 'the dramatic growth in mass tourism during the seventies and eighties'.

Sustainable tourism development is nascent and still experimental. Its governing premise is to examine consequences before one acts. The consequences – economic, environmental, social, cultural and political – should all subscribe to a set of criteria for sustainability •

Dylan Garcia/Still Pictures

Shaun Mann is tourism product and market development advisor to the Minister of Tourism, Trade and Industry in Uganda.

Asking the right questions

MEENAKSHI VARANDANI lists requirements for sustainability

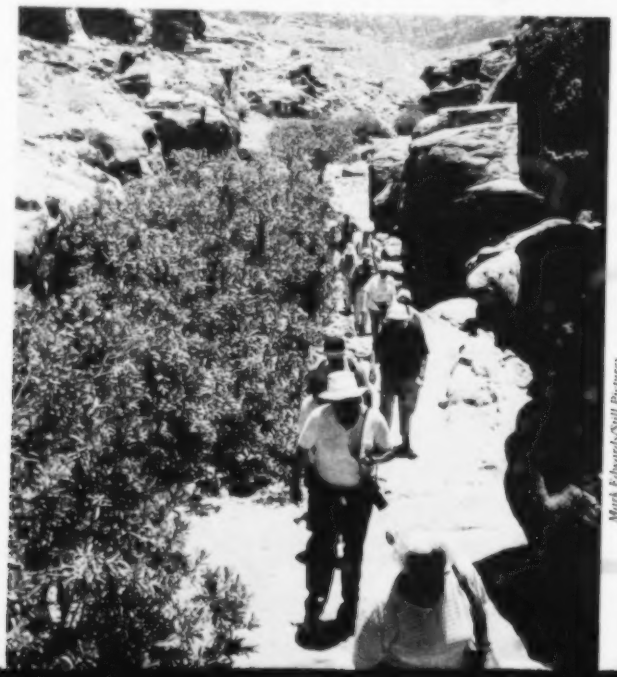
One day perhaps, we will be able to dispense with labels like 'sustainable' and 'environmental'. We would no longer need them to differentiate between desirable and prevalent practices and products – because profitability would depend upon responsible production and consumption. Today, however, we still need to ask the right questions.

Tourism, as one of the world's largest industries, has a responsibility to take leadership in sustainability. Fortunately, its profitability and longevity depend on the authenticity, clean environment and safe conditions of a destination – and all these are components of sustainability. Unsustainable tourism has adverse environmental, economic and social effects such as unplanned growth, environmental degradation, loss of wildlife habitat and biodiversity, inflated property values and the export of economic benefits.

At present, tourism development programmes assume that it is the sole option for economic development. Some experts say that the adverse impacts are inevitable and increase the risk that tourism will be exploitative. But conducting a 'community tourism assessment' before developing a programme can avoid this.

Finding the right answers

The social impacts of tourism are most visible at locations with indigenous populations. Their authenticity provides part of the destination's popularity, but then that very popularity threatens the authenticity. The inflow of new money invariably transforms the pace of their economic growth, and leads to the infusion of foreign cultures. Who should decide what the pace of this transformation should be? Tourism assessment would have to follow an education programme designed to develop community skills to take informed decisions. Could developments wait?



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Voluntary codes and guidelines for sustainable tourism must go beyond local regulations dealing with urban design controls, pollution control and suchlike. It is not enough to reach poorly defined 'low-impact' thresholds for sustainable tourism – and they can be misleading. Guidelines should go much further to address the issues of education and outreach, appropriate community development, reinvesting profits into natural habitat and wildlife protection, social impacts, heritage conservation programmes, infrastructure development, using alternative energy, rainwater harvesting and waste management.

The government, private sector, media, consumers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and host communities need to adopt supportive roles. Policy makers at the highest level must initiate tourism programmes in conjunction with community development. They must shepherd various agencies to work together, facilitate informed community decision-making, develop guidelines, create systems to disseminate information and develop supporting infrastructure.

Businesses and industry must act responsibly in good faith. If their voluntary initiatives are to be taken seriously, they will have to follow guidelines and ensure transparency, accountability and the involvement of local community stakeholders. They must meet clearly stated environmental and social objectives within specific time frames, adopt indicators and bench-marks for monitoring and measuring effectiveness, and espouse independent verification and adequate reporting. Their sponsorship is essential for achieving consumer awareness, training guides and steering advertisements to reflect the sustainable tourism guidelines.

A growing segment of tourists seek to contribute to the environment and to understand the heritage of the areas they visit. Consumers create the demand, hence the need to increase awareness. If they provide information directly to a credible reporting organization, this can be an effective monitoring tool and can help to ensure accountability.

Vision and revision

NGOs can help create visions of what could happen, and can conduct community assessments and provide independent verification. Their opinions can do much to decide whether or not particular initiatives are perceived as viable.

The host communities must participate in the decision-making process as stakeholders. They need to establish which resources can be shared, with whom, and when – and to ensure the maintenance of their environment. They must define the image of their area and target a segment of the market that is compatible with their needs.

If tourism is to be sustainable, limits must be set on the number of visitors and on the changes they bring. Issues need to be resolved or revisited while a healthy and responsible tourism industry is gradually developed•

Meenakshi Varandani, Environmental Planner, is based in New York, United States of America.

Peter Frischmann/Still Pictures

Travelling hopefully

GEOFFREY LIPMAN says that travel and tourism are changing in response to Agenda 21

Travel and tourism provided an insignificant element at the Rio Earth Summit. The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) was one of only two travel industry organizations present, and the subject was only raised peripherally. What Agenda 21 said, however, was very perceptive – that this industry has a significant potential to contribute constructively to sustainable development around the world.

Our millennium vision is to realize that potential and to create wealth, jobs and social advancement in every country on Earth. Each country – even the poorest – has some unique comparative advantage in its cultural, historical or natural heritage, which is of interest to the immense, growing body of travellers.

In one sense it is not surprising that our sector was peripheral at Rio. As an industry, we only came of age in the last quarter of the 20th century, as borders opened, disposable income increased, technology made travel a mass phenomenon, people began to consider travel as normal rather than as a luxury and countries began to see its economic advantages. We were not an evident problem child – neither a smokestack nor an extractive industry – and there were bigger industrial issues to address. Moreover, the size of the economic phenomenon of tourism has traditionally been disguised by a perception that airlines, hotels, restaurants and the like are separate supply-side activities rather than collective components in the delivery of the massive, growing consumer demand for travel for both commerce and pleasure.

Travel and tourism play a role in the economic dimension of sustainability

That perspective no longer prevails. In the past decade travel and tourism has gained recognition as the world's largest service sector activity. The demand for travel drives, directly and indirectly, more than 10 per cent of global GDP, jobs, capital investment, exports and tax revenues; the proportion is closer to 30 per cent in regions like the Caribbean that are particularly dependent on tourism. This demand is growing faster than the economy as a whole and is forecast to double every 10 to 15 years. The futurist John Naisbitt has identified travel and tourism as one of the three great drivers of the global 21st century service sector economy – along with telecommunications and information technology – and Bill Gates says that Microsoft considers it, healthcare and education to be its three primary growth targets.

So there is little dispute that travel and tourism is already playing a very significant role in the economic dimension of sustainability, and can play an even bigger one. It is increasingly understood that the influence of the demand for travel extends far beyond traditional tourism companies, into such upstream suppliers as aircraft builders or food producers and into such downstream servicers of travellers as retail shops.

Catalyst for sustainability

There is also an increasing recognition by governments, industry and consumers that travel and tourism can also become the catalyst for ecological and social sustainability – as the framers of Agenda 21 foresaw. This applies to emerging markets just as it does to industrialized nations.

This is not to gloss over the evident impacts of an industry which moves millions of people every day, which houses, feeds and entertains them (and does so increasingly in places which have unique sensitive ecosystems), whose constructions change scenery and whose activities affect indigenous populations and local communities. ▶

These impacts must be addressed. Much can be done through design, planning and wise use. We need to assess impacts, carry out environmental audits, manage capacity, optimize resources, invest in new technologies and educate suppliers, staff and customers. We need to recognize the stakes and the interests and responsibilities of the stakeholders – governments, industry and the public: this last category, of course, includes the travellers themselves and the people who live in the places they visit.

Major opportunities

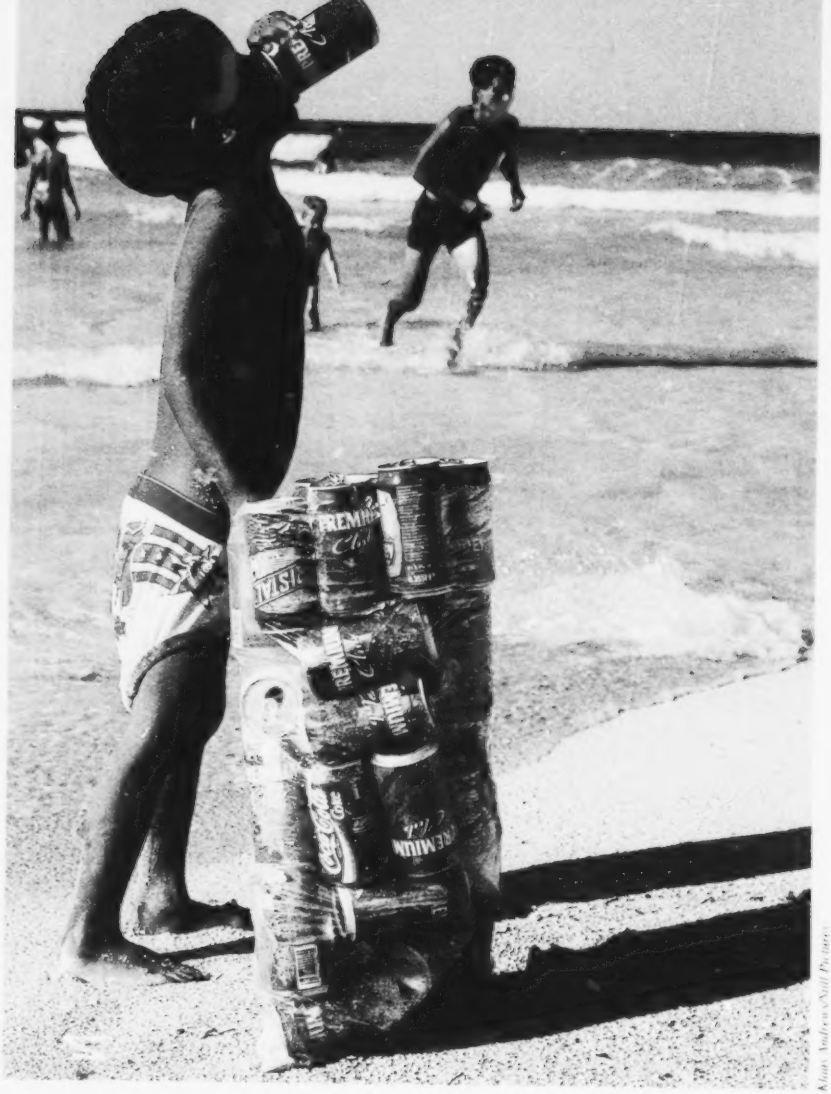
The stakes are high. Travel and tourism creates jobs more readily than most sectors, a point of prime importance to industrialized states facing high unemployment. Rural tourism is one of the few evident substitutes in declining agricultural regions in many parts of the world: ecotourism offers the potential for development to small villages in Central America, India and Africa, and cultural tourism can sustain local crafts in emerging economies with little industrial base.

The common challenges we all share are to:

- Migrate from a culture of conspicuous consumption to one of wise growth.
- Balance economic and ecological impacts.
- Find common ground between the interests of visitors and the visited.
- Spread the benefits across society – particularly to the poorest and the disadvantaged.

Travel companies and their representative bodies have moved considerably to respond to the Rio imperatives over the last decade. Major initiatives have been undertaken by transport operators to control emissions and noise, by hoteliers to improve design or to reduce energy and water use, by travel agents to cut back on paper and by cruise operators to contain waste.

Organizations like the International Hotel & Restaurant Association, the International Hotels Environment Initiative, the Caribbean Hotel Association and the Pacific Asia Travel Association are all contributing to an



Alain Andrew/Still Pictures

acceleration of global, regional and national action. So are regional government bodies like the Caribbean Tourism Organization and governments themselves – as is epitomized by the new United Kingdom tourism strategy.

In WTTC we have set in place a multidimensional strategy to promote a culture of sustainable development and a dynamic structure to achieve it.

Initiatives under way

Firstly, in an effort to give global leadership, we have joined, as partners, with the World Tourism Organization, our public sector equivalent, and the Earth Council representing environmental interests, to translate Agenda 21 for the travel and tourism sector. This identifies ten priorities for industry and nine for governments (see box).

The document was circulated extensively to industry, governments and non-governmental organizations in 1996 and has been the subject of a series of regional seminars over the past two years (Europe and Asia in 1997, Africa and the Caribbean in 1998). The seminars, which will continue, consider how to implement the strategy and identify additional points that are relevant to each region.

Recently, we introduced a major addition to the programme – the Alliance for Sustainable Tourism – to try to increase transparency of action and good practice. This invites all public and private sector travel and tourism organizations to record their activities based on Agenda 21 on a central website and to commit themselves to cooperate with all other partners. This is supported by WTTC's Internet-based information system ECONETT, which has been developed with support from the European Union. We are in the process of developing arrangements with the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives to factor this work into local Agenda 21 initiatives so as to take this

PRIORITIES FOR THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY AND GOVERNMENTS

For travel and tourism organizations

- Waste minimization, re-use, recycling.
- Energy efficiency, conservation, management.
- Management of freshwater resources.
- Wastewater management.
- Hazardous substances.
- Transport.
- Land-use planning and management.
- Involving staff, customers, communities in environmental issues.
- Design for sustainability.
- Partnerships for sustainable development.

For governments

- Assessing the regulatory framework.
- Considering the economic, social and ecological implications.
- Education, training and public awareness.
- Planning for sustainable tourism.
- Exchanging skills between developed and developing states.
- Including all sectors of society.
- Design of new products.
- Measuring progress at local level.
- Partnerships.

programme from global principles to community-based action.

Secondly, WTTC initiated an industry improvement programme, based on Agenda 21, in 1994, so as to underline the critical importance of moving from principle to practice. Green Globe started as an environmental management programme for travel companies, rapidly evolved into a Destination Management Programme, and then took one step further to incorporate certification, based on both ISO and Agenda 21 practices.

There are now 500 Green Globe members in some 100 countries dedicated to improving environmental practice. The first certification for hotels has just been completed: standards are being developed for other sectors of the industry. There are also some 20 programmes under development in tourist destinations around the world, with collaboration between the public and private sectors at their core.

Emphasis on education

Finally we are increasing attention on education and training. Educational cartoons telling children – and their parents – the importance of environmentally friendly behaviour on holiday will be shown in schools, on in-flight video screens, cruise videos and hotel television. They are based on a cartoon character, the dodo, which became extinct as a result of an environmental disaster in previous centuries – and will also target travel industry staff and suppliers.

In WTTC, we are firmly convinced that the only future for travel and tourism is one which has sustainable development at the core of corporate planning and action. Like all serious change, it will take time to work its way through the global system, but there can be no doubting its direction or that its scale, scope and pace will accelerate.

When the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development turns its attention to tourism this year it will not simply focus on the action of the major corporations. It will also reflect the initiatives and aspirations of the myriad of small and medium players that make up the bulk of the industry, and those of the travellers and the communities they visit. It will also address the interests of all countries that see travel and tourism as one of their priority development sectors.

We hope that this process will focus on the positive, rather than the negative, and will accentuate the good initiatives that have occurred since the Earth Summit, identify the gaps that remain as challenges, and support constructive collaborative actions to accelerate change. We are committed to playing our part in this•

Geoffrey Lipman is President of The World Travel & Tourism Council, United Kingdom.

Topham Picturepoint

Green beds *and* greenbacks

KENNETH F. HINE describes how hotels are increasingly realizing that protecting the environment is good business

Mark Edwards/Still Pictures

Nowadays, staying in a hotel is not the experience it used to be. You may only get fresh towels every day if you ask for them. Your hot water may have been heated by solar energy, and 'grey water' from baths, showers and washing machines may be recycled. And your key card may be a special energy-saving one which automatically turns off the electricity when you leave the room.

All this is in the cause of protecting the environment. No industry, it is probably safe to say, has a greater stake in safeguarding environmental resources than travel and tourism. A well-preserved environment is both critical to providing a good quality of life and a prime motivator in persuading people to travel throughout the world.

At the beginning of the decade, most of the world's hotels were unfamiliar with the principles of sound environmental management – and with the benefits to be gained from it. Now the 'greening' of our industry is well under way, thanks to such organizations as the International Hotel & Restaurant Association (IH&RA), the International Hotels Environment Initiative, UNEP's Industry and Environment Office, the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) – and the pioneering efforts of a core number of hotels.

Business sense

There is a double message for hotels. First, green operations ensure an attractive, sustainable environment and the future of the local community. And second, they make sound business sense. The IH&RA and its partners actively promote environmental awareness and self-regulation by the industry; they encourage hotels and restaurants throughout the world to introduce their own voluntary initiatives. As a result, hoteliers across the globe are now increasingly aware of how conserving and recycling resources benefits the bottom line.

Our own Environmental Award programme, sponsored by American Express, was launched in 1990 to acknowledge outstanding examples of leadership in planning and implementing environmental action. Over the years, it has attracted more than 280 applications from hotels in countries as diverse as Australia and India, Canada and Colombia, demonstrating a laudable degree of personal and corporate commitment to the environment.

Last year our Green Hotelier & Restaurateur of the Year award was themed to coincide with the International Year of the Ocean. For the first time special emphasis was placed on the industry's efforts to reduce water and energy consumption, through recycling and re-use and through the exploitation of renewable energy sources. There has been a growing response to the award from a wide range of concerns, ranging from small independent hotels to large international chains. As they have widely different levels of resource availability, separate awards are presented to a corporate hotelier and an independent one.

Innovation and imagination

The award scheme has identified all kinds of innovative and imaginative ideas for limiting the impact of hotel operations on the environment. A new biologically treated water distribution system installed at the Club Alda in Turkey reduces the amount used for watering grass and plants by 55 per cent at an annual saving of $35,500. The roof of the Inter-Continental Hotel in Sydney has been converted into a nursery to propagate seedlings for community tree-planting programmes, while Canadian Pacific Hotels has supplemented a comprehensive environmental management system by launching an adoption programme for endangered Beluga whales in the St. Lawrence Seaway.

Extremely encouraging though all this is, much remains to be done. Hoteliers still face many challenges. There must be greater awareness of the effects of how hotels are sited and designed. Environmental impact assessments and audits are needed. Green programmes must become more integrated into day-to-day operations. There is a need for better monitoring procedures, and there must be increased communication of environmental performance to guests and other stakeholders.

Enormous potential

The importance of tourism is increasingly being recognized – as is demonstrated, for example, by the focus the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development is placing on it for the first time since its inception, at its seventh session in New York in April 1999. IH&RA, with the WTTC, is playing a key role in organizing the business section of the dialogue, tracking progress on how the industry is implementing the actions outlined in Agenda 21 and making recommendations for future policy. The hospitality sector – and the travel and tourism industry as a whole – has enormous potential for bringing about more sustainable forms of development, and intends to do all it can to fulfil it•

Kenneth F. Hine is Director General-CEO of the International Hotel & Restaurant Association, Paris, France.

NEWS

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARD

GEOFFREY LEAN, the External Editor of *Our Planet*, was presented with a special award for life-time achievement in environmental journalism at the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of IUCN–the World Conservation Union, in November 1998.

The award, presented by Queen Noor of Jordan at Fontainebleau Palace, France, was made to launch a new series of prizes established by IUCN and the Reuters Foundation, 'to promote excellence in environmental reporting.' The organizers decided to mark the start of the scheme, the first global programme of its kind, by giving two one-off world-wide 'Foundation Awards', one for lifetime achievement and one to a promising young environmental journalist 'as an incentive to those embarking on a career in this important field.'

LONGSTANDING CONTRIBUTION

The presentation took place at the official opening ceremony of the anniversary celebrations, which were addressed by President Jacques Chirac of France, President Blaise Campaoré of Burkino Faso, President Oumar Konaré of Mali, and President Flavio Cotti of the Swiss Confederation.

Lean – who is also the Environment Correspondent for *The Independent on Sunday* in London, United Kingdom – was chosen for the premier prize by Reuters, after consulting leading scientists and authorities around the world.

Presenting the award, Queen Noor praised Lean's 'longstanding contribution to the highest standards of environmental reporting,' and said he had 'contributed significantly to bringing environmental issues to the general public.'

She added: 'Journalists and the media have played a critical role in generating and sustaining public awareness of the growing environmental threats to our planet. Considering the major challenges that we face in the next century, it is imperative that conservationists learn to communicate their knowledge to the media in a topical and non-technical manner and, in turn, that journalists help draw the links between environmental issues and people's daily lives.'

The young journalist's award was presented to Busani Bafana, 27, of the *Zimbabwe Independent*, whose stories have included coverage of a spill of cyanide-tainted sludge in a large goldmine, which created a water contamination panic in the city of Bulawayo.

A NEW SCHEME

The new awards scheme, which will start this year, will promote the coverage of environmental issues in the context of mainstream social, political and economic affairs. They will comprise eight regional awards and one global prize each year. Winners will be offered fellowships and training opportunities organized by the Reuters Foundation, the educational arm of Reuters news and information group.

'Public concern about the environment is increasing everywhere and the handling of this complex subject matter is one of the biggest challenges to today's media,' said Mark Wood, Editor in Chief of Reuters. 'Reuters is keen to promote the highest standards in environmental reporting, based on impartial journalism and sound science.'

Independent

GREATER PROMINENCE

Javad Ahmad, IUCN Director of Communications, added: 'The stories are out there, and they often relate to front page news. This award will give journalists and their editors an incentive to give greater prominence to environmental reports that provide new insights and bases for action.'

Geoffrey Lean – who has been responsible for commissioning and editing the articles for *Our Planet* since its relaunch five years ago – has been covering environment and development issues for 29 years, and has won many awards for his work. In 1987 he became a Global 500 Laureate, and his other awards include the Communication Arts Award of Excellence, the Schumacher Award, the World Environment Festival Award and a Glaxo Science Fellowship. He is consistently voted 'most impressive environmental journalist of the year' in an annual poll of his peers in the United Kingdom, and is the only newspaperman to have won the British Environment and Media Award's lifetime prize for creating awareness about the environment: subsequent winners have been Prince Charles, United States Vice-President Al Gore, broadcaster Sir David Attenborough and environmental activist Ken Saro-Wiwa •

CATALYST *for common sense*

SIMON UPTON

Preparing for my role as Chair of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) – which will concentrate in its April meeting on Oceans and Seas, Tourism, Consumption and Production patterns and Small Island Developing States – I have been warned by colleagues that the CSD is in danger of slipping off the ministerial radar screen.

Ministers do not want to waste time in discussions which result, at best, in bland and general recommendations and, at worst, in a lowest common denominator outcome. If we try to please everyone we may well end up with an outcome to which nobody can take exception, but which will move no-one to action and is likely to condemn us to repeating the process.

The CSD needs to identify clearly the key sustainable development issues – where Agenda 21 is not implemented effectively enough, or at all. We must focus on recommending practical measures for concrete action and not get bogged down in torturous debate of lengthy texts. We must produce substantive outcomes which provide clear, practical direction to governments, United Nations agencies, international organizations, businesses and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) alike at local, regional and global levels. Pages of dense negotiated text without a clear message will simply leave the *status quo* unchanged.

KEEPING REALITY IN SIGHT

The CSD needs effective input from national and regional agencies. As I set out on the road to the meeting – with its very broad agenda, and the undoubted difficulty of finding a way through the jungle of conventions, agreements and agencies (not to mention nearly 200 sovereign states) – I find it necessary to keep firmly in touch with the visions of local people around the world who want to make their homes a better place.

I am excited by the multi-stakeholder dialogue on sustainable tourism, held on the first two days of the meeting, which will draw together representatives from governments, the tourism industry, NGOs, trade unions, worker groups and local authorities. I will be looking for concrete recommendations to promote sustainable tourism

Martin Harvey/Still Pictures

Norbert Wu/Still Pictures

and would like to see some real, down-to-earth ecotourism operators from, say, the South Pacific, talking about the issues they face. What is the sustainable carrying capacity of a small atoll? How can the amount of packaging reaching its fragile ecosystem be reduced?

The CSD and other bodies concerned with tourism must look for practical answers to these questions of sustainability. Without them, the very assets on which much tourism thrives – sun, sand, surf, clean and green unspoilt environments – may become irreparably damaged or disfigured.

CLARIFYING ISSUES

The meeting can help clarify practical questions for small island developing states, where tourism is vital. Do states and their policy makers and managers know where to obtain the technical and financial support they need? Does the available support help them to respond to their problems in an integrated way? Does it back the development of harmonious approaches and priorities to regional or sub-regional problems?

Getting to grips with the mandates and capabilities of the various existing bodies – including academic institutions, bilateral donors, foundations, the private sector and NGOs – and finding ways of using their resources is a major challenge for governments. Their potential to help solve problems needs to be used in accordance with a strategic assessment of priorities.

We need to discuss the best ways of exchanging information, strengthening human and institutional capacity and taking an integrated approach. There will be many options for such activity. In my own region, small island developing states have derived real benefit from the critical mass that the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) can provide. International agencies work closely with such organizations – using their first-hand knowledge of a region, its problems and solutions which may already have been tried – as they venture into new territory.

The CSD cannot seek to be a catalyst for a global debate if it starts at the global level. It has to start with local and regional action that will then empower people to demand that we think globally – not about texts or institutions or structures or power plays, but about practical, achievable, enforceable action. To those ministers who will be working with me at this year's CSD, please let it be a triumph not for negotiators, diplomats, analysts or journalists but for common sense and modest, but achievable, goals•

The Hon. Simon Upton is the Environment Minister of New Zealand and Chairman of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

Gerard & Margi Moss/Still Pictures